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THE GREAT MOMENTS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

The Great Moments in a Woman's Life

BY

EMILY CALVIN BLAKE

Author of "Engaged Girl Sketches"

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THE GREAT MOMENTS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

THE FIRST

SIXTEEN AND IN LOVE

ONCE within the memory of my glowing yesterdays I stood enthralled at the light and joy of life. I looked from the window of my little white bedroom and saw that the flowers in Mother's rose garden nodded in a living fragrance of understanding.

I wondered suddenly if I had changed. Swiftly I went to the mirror and peered at the young face gazing back at me. No, there seemed to be no change even though this great thing had come to me. The same long-lashed eyes looked out from beneath the auburn curls; the same red lips curved in smiles.

At the sound of the luncheon bell I wondered if Rob were eating his noonday meal. The warm color crept up into my cheeks. I could not imagine my knight sitting in prosaic attitude before a table.

As I went down the broad staircase of my father's home Rob's words, with their faint accent of caress, chanted themselves in my happy mind:

"I like you, little girl. Do you like me?"

In pink confusion I had nodded, unable to meet his eyes, my fingers lying content within his hardened palm.

Mother smiled fondly at me as I slipped into my place at the table, and she asked no questions. Perhaps she remembered when sixteen summers claimed her lightly and Romance stirred her soul with its soft murmurings.

But Big Brother grasped the situation with ruthless hands. He gazed mischievously at me for a moment, then burst forth with his cruel inquiry:

"In love, Sis?" he asked.

Even now I can feel the warmth of the crimson tide that surged over my face and neck at his

question. I looked appealingly at Mother, for I could not answer with the usual aptitude of a sister who all her life has possessed a big brother. I prayed fervently that my tormentor would not mention Rob.

"Harry, don't tease Beth," Mother expostulated.

"Oh, I know the signs," the boy relentlessly pursued.

"I should think you ought to," Mother answered, her eyes meeting his roguishly.

For Mother never failed me; and, at her words, Harry with dampened ardor was silent. Once more busy with my thoughts, I nibbled delicately at my cake. That I should shortly meet Rob again filled me with a trembling delight. I wondered if Mother would let me wear my pretty blue lawn dress, but I knew that it would be useless to ask, for while Mother was kind, she never forgot; and she had told me that the dress must be reserved for state occasions, such as Sunday wear and parties.

When I was starting for school I kissed Mother lightly. (Now the thought of that listless kiss fills my eyes with tears.) As I left her a vagrant

thought stirred me. Should I tell her of this wonderful thing? But surely she could not understand a great Romance! Mother, who met Father in the hall and kissed him quietly, perhaps asked him if he were tired, and then told him that a good dinner awaited him. Oh, no, Mother could never understand.

Oh, if Rob were coming home to me! If he were coming home to me I should fly down the stairs — all athrill — glowing with this divine love. I should hold out my hands and as he neared me — I closed my eyes — I should kiss him. There should be no mention of dinner! I decided that Mother need not know for years and years. Then Rob should go to Father, and, pleading artistically, should be granted the boon of my hand.

At the corner I met him. My heart beat faster as I saw his manly figure. His noble lips seemed to me to express a determination to die for me if necessary, as I knew I could for him. For did I not love him?

"You 're on time," were his first words to me, and I gazed back reproachfully at him.

"Did you think I might be late?" I inquired.

"I 've been here for five minutes," he confided, and I rejoiced. "Jean Allen just went by," he continued; "she had on a pretty green dress."

All my shyness suddenly left me: impetuously I put my hand on his arm. "I was going to wear my blue lawn, but I thought Mother would n't like it. She worked on the lace for three days!"

"You look nice in white," he answered. "And you like me, don't you, Beth?"

I averted my face, for a thousand little needles pricked me in my embarrassment.

Rob was all concern. "What 's the matter?" he asked.

At his words my eyes brimmed with tears and my lips quivered. For a moment I could not speak, for the cause of my confusion could not be put into understandable words.

"I — I wish you would n't ask me that out here where it 's light," finally I protested. "It was lovely when you asked me this morning in the cloak-room. It 's dusk in there, you know, all silver-gray."

He smiled back at me, and I thought he understood.

"Perhaps you 'll write a note and tell me?" he asked.

"Perhaps," I promised, and then we were both silent.

And then we walked on together, and at times I looked up at him; I was small and my head just reached his shoulder. And he was the heart and soul of things — the very embodiment of everything good.

When we reached the school-yard we parted. As I turned away he called me back. He was leaning over the picketed fence, and his eyes searched mine eagerly.

"Say, Beth," he inquired, "have you ever liked any boy before?"

I stood absolutely still, shocked by his awful question.

"Oh, Rob," I cried, "how can you ask me that? I have read beautiful romances, and longed for mine to come to me. None of the men I ever read about asked his lady if he were the first."

"Well, I 'm glad you 've never liked any other boy," he said contentedly. "You must always like me, Beth."

I flashed a glance of promise at him from eyes that were grave with the distinction of the moment. I would always be true! Never, never could I look at any other. And if he should die I should die, too, for life would not be worth the living if he were gone from me.

Sixteen and in love! What fairer thing can this world offer? The birds caroled to me alone as I went home from school. The years ahead were filled with royal visions, because I was in love, and was beloved. Oh, I would study night and day, so that he might not be ashamed of me when that glorious time should dawn and he should claim me for his own.

I thought again of Mother; then of the neighbors who lived on both sides of us. Though they all smiled they did not seem to be living in a world of bliss. I pondered. Why not? Did they not love their husbands? I drew a deep breath. Such sustained happiness as marriage should make one smile and smile, and sing and — I whispered the words tenderly — thank God because He had made Love.

And so my days passed, each one with changing but ever-lovely dreams. Nothing common-

place now remained in my world. Rob sometimes brought me a flower plucked from his mother's garden, and all day I wore it at my throat. When its petals fell away I gazed deep down into its heart and knew its story.

Then came the school picnic, the thought of which had kept me awake for many hours. Mother packed my basket, and I rebelled at the cheese sandwiches.

"Just a few vanilla wafers, Mother," I protested. "I know I shall be satisfied with the flowers and the sky."

I remember the little smile on Mother's lips. "Take them anyway," she said. "Harry may be hungry later, although I've packed a dozen sandwiches for him."

So I took the distasteful basket and the sandwiches. I slipped into the basket a little book of poems — bound in white and blue. Perhaps Rob would like to hear a few verses — verses that told of immortal love.

The day was fair and the woods lay spotted in green and gold. Rob and I soon left our companions and wandered away. By a little brook

and under a sighing tree he arranged his coat so that I might sit down. He sat on the grass and gazed out on the water.

Finally I spoke. "Rob," I murmured, "I brought some verses. I think I should like to read them to you. There are cases like ours, you know."

He fixed his eyes longingly on the basket. "Have you any good sandwiches?" he asked.

My heart sank like lead. He saw my disappointment.

"We 'll eat a few sandwiches," he said; "then read."

I stifled my feelings and handed him a sandwich, while I bit into a wafer. I remember that he ate three sandwiches, and then dipped into the brook for a drink of water. Then when he returned to me he seated himself comfortably, "ready for the poetry."

I opened the little book lovingly. (I have it yet.)

"Here 's one," I began, "about a lover who stole his mistress from beneath a stern father's roof. He placed her on his noble white steed

and rode forth with her into the night." I was pale and trembling with the excitement of it; the color always faded from my cheek when I read the story of this daring lover.

"Why did he steal her?" he asked.

"Why?" I echoed in amazement. "Why, Rob, because her father would n't let him have her. Here 's another telling of a girl who died broken-hearted because her lover was killed in the war."

My voice, weighted with the travail of the story, sank to a whisper.

"Read that," Rob said. And I read in the mournful voice of sixteen the touching love story. But the tears welled up and blurred the page, and I could not finish. Rob touched my arm gently and bent his head till his eyes met my tear-filled ones and compelled their gaze. Then I knew what he meant to do. I put out my hand, but he did not heed the tentative gesture.

The green and gold of that perfect day blushed to coral-pink as I felt his lips on mine, the first such kiss that I had ever known. With a little cry I covered my face. Then suddenly a pas-

sionate gratitude filled me. I lowered my hands and looked at him.

"Does every girl feel so thankful when she is kissed?"

"Thankful?" he repeated, greatly puzzled.

"Yes. When you kissed me I felt thankful that I was alive, that God was good, that all the earth was green, that flowers smelled sweet and that the stars shone at night. You understand, don't you, Rob?"

"I understand, Beth," he answered softly, after a pause. (Now I know that for him no meaning attached itself to my words.)

The ride home! Oh, to be young again and dreaming of primrose days that reach to the horizon of the limitless! To believe that everything is good — to know that God made the world for you and for him.

With a sacred feeling in my heart I bade him good-night. The glow of my love transcended him and made of him a god. Deep in an inner sanctuary I locked the remembrance of his kiss. We two alone knew and the secret was holy! I said my prayers that night with a greater sense of uplifting than I had ever known.

Next morning I lay dreaming till the breakfast bell sounded. Then hurriedly I dressed, for Father did not like to have us late. When I reached the dining-room he had gone, however, on an earlier train than usual. Mother answered my greeting pleasantly, and handed me my coffee in the little rosebud cup that I loved; but Harry did not look at me. He was cross, and when he spoke his voice was harsh and his eyes cold.

"You 're a nice girl," he said, his tones expressing angry condemnation. "You go wandering away alone with Rob Allison and read poetry to him. Then you let him kiss you. I tell you I did n't feel very pleasant about it when he told the boys. I licked him, but that does n't prevent everybody's knowing that you did it."

I saw Mother at the end of the table fading in the darkness that fell upon me. As if in a dream I saw her raise her hand and try to compel Harry's silence. But his arraignment went on bitterly, recklessly.

"He stood there and bragged about it, Mother; laughed about it and jeered; said he could do it any time." Blindly, yet with wide-

open, smarting eyes, I saw him gulp in impotent rage. "Does n't she know that she ought n't to let any boy kiss her — has n't she been taught better than that, Mother?"

Now I know that the unforgiving youth within him spoke sharply. Again Mother held up a forbidding hand, and with tender thought she came to me and put her shielding arms about me.

"Come upstairs, darling," she whispered; "come upstairs to Mother's room."

To Mother's room! The words slowly penetrated my dull consciousness; to Mother's room where as a child I had lisped my tiny troubles, and Mother had never failed me.

She placed me gently on the lounge and with her arms still about me she knelt beside me.

"Has not my little daughter learned," she said, "that Mother always understands?"

Something within me snapped, and the stormy sobs tore at my throat. Mother held me close till the trembling ceased and left me still again. One stinging thought lashed me:

"He told, Mother, he told!" The words burned my lips. "It was so sacred, so beautiful, and he told."

"He told, Beth, and that was dastardly." (I can hear Mother's gentle voice as if 't were but yesterday she spoke!) "But we cannot play with love ever, ever."

"Play, Mother, play? Oh, you do not know. It was so real to me."

She stroked my hair as she answered with her infinite wisdom:

"Wholesome companionship is all that my little girl needs now. And she must keep her heart a shrine, her lips untouched, till the right one comes."

"Was n't he the right one, Mother?"

"No, dear. At sixteen a girl is simply in love with love. You were as happy away from this boy as when with him, were n't you?"

I thought of the flowers and the woods and the rose-colored days; all had been touched by the magnetism of my love; and I knew that Mother was right.

"He represented an ideal, that is all, Beth, and you could make no distinction. You must wait for real love. And, Daughter, it is so much more beautiful than the ideal; it is so full, so rich.

One must grow toward it, not seize it with impetuous hands."

But suddenly the drowning, suffocating realization of Rob's perfidy filled me again.

"Oh, Mother," I cried, "I can never go to school after this. I can't look at him again. I was so happy that he kissed me that I told God so last night."

Mother did not answer at once, she only held me closer, murmuring loving, soothing words. And as the greatness of her understanding reached me, so also did a quick-born knowledge of the depth of her love.

"I can bear anything, Mother," I cried, "while I have you. You do understand, don't you, even though you think only of breakfast and dinner, and not of love."

Mother smiled, a tremulous, knowing little smile. She patted my hand, the while I saw her eyes rest tenderly on the picture of my father.

THE SECOND

THOSE DAYS WHEN SHE LIVES IN A FABRIC OF DREAMS

IT was in Mother's rose garden that He told me he loved me. It seemed that I had waited all my life to hear him say he cared in this way. His voice went pulsing through me. I could not look at him.

"Shall I see your father to-night?" he asked, after a long pause.

Then in very fear I looked at him. "Oh, not yet," I begged. "To-morrow, perhaps, but not to-night!"

He smiled down at me.

"You shall always have your way, Beth," he promised earnestly.

When he had left me I crept up the broad stairs to my little white room.

I leaned out of the window and listened till

his last footfall had died away. One refrain rang joyously in my heart: He loved me; he loved me.

Some days later Father called me to him and put his arms about me. He did not speak.

"Are you sorry, Father?" I asked.

"It is hard to part with my one little girl," he murmured; "but you will be happy, Beth. He is a good man."

And Mother kissed me lingeringly. I felt in her kiss the warmth of her tender love and the sorrow of her renunciation.

We were to be engaged for six months before our marriage. This was my parents' wish, and I was very willing to consent to it.

"Six months, Beth," Mother said; "in which time you must learn a great deal about cooking and sewing."

"Oh, Mother," I remonstrated; "I could n't think of cooking at this beautiful time."

"But Floyd will have to eat in order to live."

"I suppose that is true," I answered; "but those things are so unimportant"— I caught Mother's laughing glance, and hastily concluded —"that is, as compared to other great things."

Mother wisely maintained silence, and I pursued my halcyon course, living a roundelay of golden dreams. I idealized Floyd, yet watched him critically.

"I am glad that you are just as you are," I confided to him one evening. "I like even the way in which you move your hands."

Floyd stirred in embarrassment.

"I 'm really very ordinary, little girl," he said; "ordinary in everything but my love for you. You must n't make an ideal of me."

I smiled at him and shook my head. I knew so much better than he, for he failed to realize that he was different from all the other men in the world.

And so those rosy days vanished one by one, and two months before our marriage Floyd's mother gave a dinner for me. I was excitedly happy at the prospect, and on the night of the affair I waited all aglow for Floyd. My simple white dress that Mother had made for me had three deep flounces, scalloped in palest blue, and a surplice of filmy lace. (The lace had trimmed Mother's wedding gown.)

When we had entered the carriage — which

was a luxury to us, indulged in for this occasion — Floyd turned to me.

"Mary told me that your mother and father have gone by car line," he said. "Why?"

"Mother thought that we might enjoy the ride better alone," I answered shyly.

He drew nearer to me.

"Beth —" he began softly.

"Yes," I answered encouragingly, for he seemed to hesitate.

"I wish, dear, that you could be a little more interested in this dinner," he said. "Mother has spent so much time and loving thought on it."

With eyes widening with sudden hurt I gazed back at him. In a moment his arms were about me.

"What a beast I am!" he cried. "Never mind me, Beth. How could I speak so to you?"

"But tell me what you mean, Floyd," I insisted. "I am interested in this affair. Have I not seemed so? Please be frank with me."

He took my hand gently in his.

"Well, Beth," he said, "since our engagement

you have not seemed so close to me as before. You don't seem substantial."

"Not substantial, dear?" I repeated, my voice trembling, and the tears suddenly rushing in a hot flood to my eyes.

He was seized with deep remorse and attempted to soothe me.

"Never mind, Beth," he whispered tenderly. "Perhaps I've grown accustomed to my sister. She's not ethereal in the least. But I would n't have you changed for the world."

We had reached his home by that time and nothing more could be said.

Floyd's pride in me, his mother's love and the lights and flowers all tended to raise my drooping spirits.

On the return home, however, I referred to the early conversation.

"Will you tell me, Floyd," I asked, "just how you would like me to act? I want to please you."

"Dear little girl," he answered gravely. "Do forget my words. You will please me most by remaining as you are."

And I was satisfied, and continued to live in

my dream-world where no practical, everyday person might enter.

Yet I essayed to be of use. One day I went with Mother into the kitchen.

"Let me learn to make the dainties, Mother," I suggested. "I don't want to think of steak and such things."

"Steak is not eaten where you are dwelling at present, Beth?" Mother ventured.

I smiled. "Where I am dwelling there is nothing but sunshine, flowers and perfume. And listen," I leaned near till my hair brushed Mother's face; "I 'm always going to live in such a kingdom. I 'm going to take Floyd there with me, too."

"A kingdom with too rarefied an atmosphere for most men, Daughter," Mother replied. "But let us hope that Floyd will not find it so."

I paused in my labor of whipping cream.

"Why do you say those things, Mother?" I asked reproachfully. "Because I am so happy and in a world of my own creating, why do you discourage me?"

"I don't try to discourage you, Beth," Mother replied gently. "But my experience extends

over many years. I realized that the practical things of life must be met when your father called me from the clouds to sew on a missing button. The air which you breathe now, dear, would smother one of practical tendencies. Why, Beth, even you will be cloyed by too much sweetness after a while."

"Never, Mother," I affirmed; "you cannot impress me with your sentiments. And Floyd will follow me into any region where I may wing."

It was at this time that I was invited to visit an aunt and cousin. I shook my head as I read the letter, then repeated its contents to Mother.

"I don't care to go," I said; "I 'd rather stay at home."

"I wish that you would go, dear," Mother answered. "You may not have another chance for some time. I know your aunt will be greatly disappointed if you do not accept her invitation."

So, to please Mother, but greatly against my own inclinations, I went. The parting with Floyd was a pathetic one, although he smiled at me tenderly and whispered many promises.

My cousin was also engaged. Her fiancé lived out of town and she received letters from him twice a week, while I received a daily letter from Floyd. I looked rather in pity at Florence the first morning I sat at breakfast with her in her pretty home.

"Does n't Mr. Fenton write every day?" I asked, a conscious little feeling of pride making itself manifest in my tones.

Florence laughed breezily.

"No," she answered; "there would be nothing to write about every day."

"But he could reiterate things," I suggested softly.

Florence opened candid eyes on me.

"But I don't require reiteration," she responded; "I know all that he feels," she added tenderly.

But I was not convinced. My cousin's exhilarating ways amused me, however, and far from my expectations I greatly enjoyed my visit.

One morning at breakfast Florence read a letter, while a little frown settled on her brow. She looked across the table at her mother.

"Henry thinks he ought to go to Denver in

regard to some business matters," she said. "I trust his judgment, but I think he is working too hard."

My aunt smiled back reassuringly.

"You with fears, Florence!" she mocked gayly. "Henry is young and strong."

The frown disappeared.

"Of course he is," Florence agreed in her usual crisp voice. "How foolish I am."

A few moments later I went up to my own room. I drew from the desk all the letters that Floyd had written to me. They were filled with expressions of endearment and projects for my entertainment when I should return. Eagerly I read them all. But in none did I find that for which I sought. There was nothing that could cause a worried little frown to appear on my brow. He did not trust me — this was my impetuous conclusion.

Suddenly I made up my mind. I would go home, where I could live in the glamour that had surrounded me since my engagement. Here Florence's practical views had thrown down the ideal barricade which I had erected about myself.

To decide usually meant to act, and despite my aunt's remonstrances I left the next morning. I did not telegraph to Mother I was coming since I wanted to surprise her.

How slowly the train traveled! I was longing to be in the rose-filled garden where everything would speak of my love and where sentiment would reign supreme. I did eventually arrive at my destination. I left my luggage at the station, and took an express suburban train for home.

I ran first to the garden and spoke lovingly to Mother's roses. Then I went into the house through the little side door that Father had had built for Mother when she first came as a bride. (She almost lived then among the roses.)

To the left from the library came the sound of Mother's voice and Father's in answer. Then came the low tones of the one whom I loved best on earth. I felt my heart leap. Why was Floyd here now, at five o'clock? I went forward quickly, but as I put my hand out to open the door his words stilled me into inaction.

"I think the marriage ought to be postponed," he said.

A sudden dizziness obscured my vision. My limbs refused to obey the dictates of my will — that I must leave; that I had no right to be eavesdropping. The next words in my father's calm voice aroused me.

"Confide in Beth, Floyd. She'll stand by you," he said.

"I know that, sir." At Floyd's words I lifted my head, a feeling of joy surging through me. "But you see," the even tones went on, "Beth would not understand. I could n't marry her now that my income is so reduced."

"But you 'll bring it up again very soon, my lad," my father replied confidently.

"But in the meantime," Floyd said — "in the meantime, sir! Beth lives in an ideal world. Could I expect her to understand, to share this trouble with me? I could not ask it of her. Yet, my sister — "

He paused and Mother finished the sentence for him.

"Your sister advised you to tell Beth, I am sure," she said.

"Yes," Floyd admitted. "But she judges Beth from her own standpoint. Beth is a

flower and I want to cherish her. She must n't suffer for me."

Silence again fell, while I learned this hard lesson outside. So! I was entirely useless!

"Well, Floyd"— I could hear my father rise —"I am very sorry that this partner of yours left you in such a tight place. But you must have courage, my boy. Mother will tell Beth as gently as she can."

"Perhaps, sir," Floyd's voice was low —"perhaps we 'd better not tell Beth. That 's what I half decided; simply delay the wedding for a time. She would think nothing of that if you should ask her. And then I could work doubly hard until I felt that I could offer her what she deserves."

Unable to bear more I threw open the door. The startled little group in the library gazed upon me in alarm. Mother went forward, but Floyd was the first to reach me. With a tremendous effort he forced a smile to his face and kissed me lovingly.

"Well, little girl," he began, in pacific tones, "you did surprise me."

The force of my emotion nearly choked me.

"Oh, don't, don't," I cried, pushing him from me. "Don't call me that; don't smile at me. Oh, am I so useless? Mother, don't you see that I am a woman now, not a plaything, not a toy!"

"You heard all?" Mother asked, her voice low.

"Yes, I heard all."

Quickly I went to the man I loved.

"Am I not to be trusted?" I asked him gravely, yet with a sobbing catch in my breast that I could not control. "Am I not to be trusted? I am yours for all times. I am substantial, dear, and I want you to marry me while you have nothing. Will you, Floyd?"

Oh, I waited, waited for his answer that would prove me worthy or wanting in essentials!

With a very passion of love he caught me to him.

"Beth," he cried—"Beth! Don't say any more."

Then, with a gesture of humility, he turned to my father.

"I am not worthy of her, sir," he said, "but may I have her very soon?"

Father nodded silently, his eyes filled with tears. I raised my head and looked over Floyd's shoulder.

"Shall I broil the steak to-night, Mother?" I asked.

THE THIRD

WHEN THE FIRST REALITIES CREEP INTO HER LIFE

WE had been married nearly six weeks and were settled in our little home when Floyd broached a subject that made me flush and turn away with an embarrassed feeling.

"We must agree upon a sum of money with which to run the house," he said.

"Please don't talk about that, Floyd," I said. Then meeting his eyes I finished: "I 'll ask you for money as I need it."

"Well, as you please, Beth. But I 'll give you some to begin with."

He placed ten dollars on the table, but I did not touch it. A peculiar shyness filled me at the thought of receiving the money or even discussing such sordid questions.

But in joint possession of our new home we were so happy that for the moment everything

else was forgotten. We had a little maid in the kitchen who watched us in an interested fashion. I am sure that she dreamed dreams of the romance that should be hers some day as she saw our great happiness.

To my surprise the ten dollars fairly melted away. It had seemed such a lot of money with which to buy eatables. Of course, the pantry had to be stocked, and I found that staples, such as flour, sugar and coffee, though unromantic, had to be paid for.

When the last dollar had gone I sat down and reviewed things. Of one fact I was certain: I could not ask Floyd for more money.

"Why, at this rate," I thought in great perturbation, "it will cost about twenty dollars a week for eatables. I don't know what to do. And besides, the little servant has to be paid."

I felt a little sad when I welcomed Floyd that evening. But in the cheer of his presence I soon forgot my discomfort. However, it was brought vividly before me the next morning when the little maid asked me what we were to have for dinner.

I stared back at her, the unruly lump in my

throat threatening to muffle my tones. With what dignity I could I answered that I myself would go to market.

As I walked down the quiet street I tried to think matters out. But no solution presented itself. I was absolutely penniless. I went toward the shop with a sinking heart. I felt as a beggar might soliciting charity.

"If Floyd had mentioned it last night perhaps I could have admitted that I needed money," I thought.

The proprietor himself came forward to greet me. I heard afterward that he always felt a keen interest in brides. Before I could speak (and I don't know what I was going to say) he began brightly:

"I was going to call at your house some time during the morning. I wanted to see you about starting a charge account. We render bills only every sixty days. Most stores render them every thirty days."

A charge account! I felt as if I had received a reprieve when I heard those three magic words. Of course, that simplified matters. I smiled back at him and hastened to reply that I thought the

idea was a good one. So with lavish hand I ordered many delicacies that I knew Floyd would enjoy, and with a lightened heart I again walked down the street leading to our home and sought Sophie in the kitchen.

"I have opened a charge account with Frazier's," I announced. "If I forget anything at any time you may order by telephone and it will be sent."

So this troublesome matter was settled, and I breathed freely again. The fact that bills would be rendered would obviate the hateful necessity of asking Floyd for money. This sordid matter need not be mentioned between us. In honor of this solution of my difficulties I decided to spend the afternoon with a friend.

I dressed slowly, the keen joy I felt in the possession of my own home making me linger to pat each inanimate thing. I pinned the white hat that had been part of my trousseau above my waving hair, and slowly drew on my gloves. I wondered if I should carry the white purse to match my hat, or the alligator leather that Floyd had given to me — his first present. I decided on the alligator purse. I touched it lovingly as I

opened its silver clasp. Then a dire thought came: I did not have carfare!

I sat down. I knew that I could not, would not, borrow carfare from the household money even if any were left. Were such questions always going to intrude themselves?

I removed my hat and drew the gloves from fingers that were shaking. What should I do? There was one course only open to me, and that the one from which I shrank. I could not ask Floyd for money for myself. It seemed hard when the possibility had faced me to have to ask him for household expenses, but I felt that I could never, never ask him for personal spending money.

Sophie brought up some stockings from the wash. She gazed in her interested fashion at me. Her look plainly indicated a lively curiosity, for I had called to her that I should spend the afternoon out.

"Give me the stockings," I said; "I think I shall stay at home and mend them."

Sophie reluctantly relinquished them.

"If you 're not well I 'll mend the stockings," she offered graciously.

"I'm perfectly well," I answered. "And, Sophie," I found difficulty in managing my voice, "never mind ordering the flowers for the dinner to-morrow. I have known their fragrance to give my mother a headache. We can use the fern-dish for a centerpiece.

I felt myself flushing miserably under the girl's eye. She still stood in the doorway. Would she never go?

"What time will your mother be here to-morrow?" she asked.

I told her, and unwillingly she left me.

The days passed on, and not even to Mother did I confide my difficulties. Once as I thought of Father and his goodness to me a remembrance crossed my mind. I had never had to ask him for money with which to buy necessities! Why did n't Floyd think of my needs?

The next moment I assailed myself for my disloyalty. But the seed had been sown, and I felt a slight grievance against him.

We had been reading together one evening when Floyd asked me if I had any money left!

"You must need some for the house, Beth," he said; "ten dollars can't last forever."

"I — I don't need any for the house — now," I stammered, the old distaste for the subject rushing over me.

"Well, you are a wonderful housekeeper," he answered admiringly. "I think I'll leave you some money, anyway. You may need it."

He took out his long, flat pocketbook and gazed at its contents ruefully.

"I've only five dollars with me, Beth," he said; "but I'll leave that. Let me know when you want some more for the house."

"For the house." The words echoed resoundingly in my ear. Had he no thought of me? Must I go to him and ask him to allow me even carfare? The hot pride rose in arms against this imposition. He had a sister and knew that she needed money. Ask him, ask him, my better sense urged. But I could not seek his bounty.

I was miserable, and I am sure that Floyd missed something in me, though he said nothing. I was ever tender of his comfort, but with my romantic nature this money trouble seemed a terrible one.

But there came a seeming solution one day.

I would earn money for myself. I could give piano lessons, and Floyd need know nothing about the work. Fortunately, Father had given me a piano for a wedding gift, so that I could have pupils come to the house. Through a neighbor I obtained three little girl students, who together brought me three dollars a week. Sophie stood aghast at this act. But she said nothing. I spent several hours a day at the piano, and the roses faded from my cheeks, but soon I had money for my expenses, and Floyd need never know, I told myself.

I had been teaching for some time when the bill from the grocery store was rendered. I opened the envelope slowly. It was directed to me but it would be easy to place it on Floyd's desk, so that he might see it and send a check without need of discussion.

As I unfolded the bill and gazed at the three figures that met my eye I gasped! One hundred and twenty-five dollars, it read; one hundred and twenty-five dollars for sixty days for groceries alone. This was besides the rent, the gas, the maid's wages and other monthly expenses. The

bill was not itemized. I ran to Sophie in the kitchen.

"Can you imagine why this bill should be so large?" I said. "The meat bill is not even included."

Sophie opened innocent eyes.

"What bill?" she inquired.

"The bill from Frazier's. One hundred and twenty-five dollars, Sophie, for sixty days, and only once have we entertained."

"Well, bills do mount up," Sophie responded calmly; "especially when you order delicacies out of season."

"Did you order anything?" I demanded.

Sophie grew indignant.

"Not for myself, I assure you. When you had company that one time you forgot several things, and I had to order them. You gave me leave, Ma'am."

"And then there 's the milk and the coal," I said; and I turned wearily away and went back to my own room. This was a nightmare! I remembered Mother's words that I could not always dwell in the clouds, but must meet every-

day, practical things. And because I could not bring myself to ask Floyd for money this bill had grown — I thought if I had paid cash I would perhaps have been more careful — I had to teach unruly, unwilling little pupils, and the direst consequence of all was that I was growing very weary. Weary, and married so short a time.

I counted out my little hoard of wealth. It amounted to five dollars, for I had spent some money on gloves and handkerchiefs. The five dollars which Floyd had given to me last had gone for household utensils. I went slowly to the window. Then as I passed the long mirror I caught sight of a bill pinned over the corner. Beneath it a bit of paper was stuck, and written in Floyd's firm hand were these words:

"The little girl may need this for the house."

But the humor, if any was intended, fell lifeless. My eyes flashed, and then softened in a deluge of tears.

"I hate it all," I cried aloud; "I hate it all. It seems play to Floyd, and it 's so serious."

I leaned my aching head on the marble of the

dresser; then gazed up at the bill stuck in the glass.

"To think that the lack of you could make one so miserable," I thought; "I could not have believed it." I stared at it for some moments, then, with a determination born of the situation, I went to my tiny writing-desk and wrote a note. It ran:

"*Dear Floyd:*

"Here is the grocery bill. You can see the dreadful amount. If, after you see it (it's for sixty days only), you feel that I am too extravagant, perhaps I can go home for a little while until you get on your feet again. (The tears overflowed and splashed on the paper at this idea, but I went on.) I did n't do it purposely, Floyd. You remember that night when I did n't eat white asparagus, and said that I did n't like it? Well, Floyd, really I love it, but I felt that one tiny bunch had to be enough when it costs seventy-five cents. So in a way I did try to economize. If you would rather that I 'd stay I can still continue giving piano lessons. I have been promised five pupils and that would mean five dollars a week; that would help some. And we could let Sophie go. BETH."

I read over the little note, and then placed it in an envelope and addressed it; a great weight seemed suddenly to have lifted from my shoulders. Surely if I worked and Floyd

worked, together we might pay the debt and then I would be more careful; at this thought a song rose to my lips, the first for many days.

But after dinner I felt a creeping nervousness seize me. I wanted this affair over.

"There 's a letter on the desk, Floyd," I said, trying to speak lightly. "It 's for you. Will you go upstairs and read it?"

"A letter," he repeated; "well, come along with me and I 'll read it."

I took his hand and we mounted the stairs together. He went straight to the desk and lifted the letter. I clutched one corner of the curtain tight and gazed with strained eyes out upon the stars.

Now — now, I told myself, Floyd was probably reading my offer of the five dollars weekly to be contributed to the general fund. Would he accept?

All-suddenly I found myself grasped in his arms and crushed against his breast. I caught one glimpse of his face, white with feeling.

"Oh, Beth, Beth," he cried, "how could you, how could you? You, my wife, working so

hard to help me! Oh, dearest, forgive my selfishness!"

"Your selfishness," I started to protest, then remembered that I had so accused him mentally.

For a moment there was silence, then he stooped and kissed each of my fingers. "You must never, never teach again," he cried; "promise me, Beth, that you will never do anything like that again."

"But — the money — " I breathed.

"Shall money destroy our happiness, the confidence that we have in each other?" he asked earnestly. "Oh, how nearly it came to making you hate me!"

I drew away from him and looked up into his eyes.

"Hate you, Floyd — listen, it has been my fault. The grocer and the butcher and the candlestick-maker refuse to accept idealities in payment for their wares. I've learned that. And I can't buy gloves — "

I stopped in tardy embarrassment, the hot color flashing up into my face.

"Gloves, gloves," he repeated. A fresh access

of compunction seized him. "I never thought of gloves and things." He stopped and gazed at me, the sorrow in his eyes reaching out and touching me strongly. "And you would n't ask me, Beth, when you knew that it would be a joy to me to let you have anything that I could get for you."

At once a degree of courage seized me.

"That 's just it, Floyd," I whispered; "I don't know what you can do. I don't know the amount of your income, Floyd, nor how I can help you to spend it and to save it."

"How blind I have been," he answered; "but we 'll put everything on a business basis right now — my blessed little partner."

I looked at his strong yet tender mouth; then with sudden shyness I buried my face on his shoulder.

"Floyd" (I don't know now how he heard the muffled tones), "I want a blue hat trimmed with daisies — "

"And a blue gown sprigged with lavender," he responded happily, with a fine disregard for the fitness of things.

THE FOURTH

WHEN AS A YOUNG MOTHER SHE SETS THE PACE

WHEN my first baby lay in my arms nothing else was of moment in the world. The memories of the past and the hopes of the future faded, leaving but the glorious present.

A tiny girl nestled close, and that she should bear my name was Floyd's wish. But I had in mind another, and eventually we called the baby Faire Elizabeth. (My mother was so called and the name was appropriate.)

When the baby came to us Floyd and I would watch her as she slept, then look mutely at one another, filled with a breathless wonder that she belonged to us and that we must help her to unfold into a perfect flower. When she was five months old Floyd declared fondly that she had the same trick of expression that was mine when I was in a roguish mood. But that was fancy!

My days were given over to her, and sometimes a goodly portion of what should have been my sleeping hours; but nothing mattered, because she was mine. Sometimes I put my hand on her tiny beating heart and felt that I should die if the throbbing ceased. If my friends came to see me I was happy, but I did not go to see them. The baby reigned supreme.

Mother came one day. She held the baby for some time, then, without preface, she asked me why I was so thin and pale.

"Oh," I answered lightly, "I suppose because I do not go out enough."

"You should go out more and try to forget the baby for a time," she advised.

I gazed at her in amazement.

"Forget my baby, Mother? Surely you are jesting?"

"You must go out and see friends," she repeated; "you cannot afford to lose your friends, even for the baby. And for Floyd's sake you must not become narrow, bound by one interest only."

It was strange that the memory of some of my

past blunders came to me then. "Is it a mistake, Mother?" I asked.

"Yes, dear," she replied; "it is wrong to yield everything to the baby. You must live a broad, full life, if only for her future sake."

So Mother arranged that she should come every Wednesday afternoon and care for the baby while I paid my calls.

But the first day that I left them together my heart ached. Faire lay in her cradle, contentedly munching her pink fist, yet I fancied that she looked reproachfully at me, as if she asked me how I could leave her. I gave Mother explicit directions for preparing Baby's food and warned her to keep the little feet well covered.

"Yes, dear," Mother answered patiently; "I kept your feet well covered, I think."

I answered her whimsical smile, then started on my round of visits. I was extremely uninteresting to my hostesses, I know; I fidgeted during the thirty minutes that I spent at each house, and when the last call was paid I got home as quickly as possible.

But Baby was actually safe; she was asleep,

and Mother sat placidly knitting at the window, far away from the cradle. I dropped on my knees beside my darling.

"Oh, Baby, Baby!" I murmured.

"Don't wake her, Beth," Mother said serenely.

"Oh, Mother," I cried, "I can't leave her again. I want you to come every Wednesday, but we 'll stay at home, or else take the baby out; but I can't leave her."

"Very well," Mother answered quietly.

I told Floyd my experience. He laughed and then said lightly: "And I had taken the chances of buying theatre tickets for to-night, Beth!"

"But we could n't take the baby," I reminded him.

"Sister said that she would be delighted to come any time and take care of the baby for a few hours," he said.

"Oh, I know that," I answered readily; "but, of course, we could n't think of such a thing. Don't you remember, Floyd, that we have to remain in the theatre for three hours."

"To be absolutely correct," he said, "we should have to be away about three hours and a half; but it does n't matter, Beth."

Afterward I went upstairs to Baby. She was sleeping, but just as I turned away she opened her eyes. I could not leave her then. So I threw her silken comforter about her and took her downstairs with me.

"Floyd," I called, "here is your little daughter."

But when I looked into the library he was not there. Where could he have gone? I went into the kitchen to Sophie to see if he had left any message with her. She told me that he had run out for a breath of fresh air. I was relieved and went upstairs again with Baby. In her sweet presence I forgot about Floyd, and while rocking her I, too, fell asleep. It was midnight when I awoke and Floyd had just come upstairs. "Stopped to see a friend," he exclaimed, "and we talked till after eleven."

It was some days later that he held up a theatre ticket. We had just finished dinner.

"I have been longing to see 'The Merchant of Venice,'" he confided, smiling; "so I'm going to-night."

I smiled back at him. "I'm so glad, dear," I answered; "be sure that you enjoy yourself."

A faint cry echoed from the upper regions, and I ran to answer it; I nearly knocked Floyd over as he stood in the door of the dining-room. Flushed and panting, I laughed down at him from the stairs.

"I 'll see you in the morning," I called.

He said nothing, but stood gazing up at me. Then when I had reached the top landing he called:

"It 's the first time—"

"Oh, pardon me, Floyd," I cried; "the baby is insistent now."

Every time I held Faire to me I felt the same thrilling joy possess me. Every time she opened her eyes and gazed back into mine I felt that God had given me enough joy to compensate me for any suffering that I might have to endure in years to come.

And so she grew, and every day she unfolded her petals to me; and once she was very ill. It was one night when Floyd was away again, at the theatre, I think. I telephoned for the doctor, and as he bent over the cradle an agony of fear clutched at me and turned me cold.

But the doctor saved her for me; he did not

laugh at my fears, but told me what I should do in case of another attack. I held her in my arms all night. Floyd came in at midnight, but I put up a warning finger and he crept silently to bed, while I looked at my baby and thought of the poor mothers who have to open their arms and let their babies slip from them.

When the child was entirely well and sleeping as usual I commenced to spend a part of my evenings with Floyd. We began to read, as we had before Faire was born. But I could not become interested. My ear was strained to catch the sound of her voice.

Floyd closed the book one time, and I did not notice. It was with a sudden start that I realized he was not reading. He smiled at me and then came and stood near me.

"Culver asked me to go to his house to-night," he said. He paused a moment, then continued his staccato sentences: "Just a few men; sort of a little smoker; I refused; thought maybe you 'd be downstairs to-night. But you 're not, so I 'll go."

"But I am downstairs, Floyd."

"Well, yes," he laughingly amended; "your

body is, but your spirit is upstairs with the baby." He stooped and kissed me lightly. "Don't wait up for me."

When he had gone I sat down there for a little time. I felt the impress of his careless kiss still upon my cheek; for the first time I remembered that he had never left me before the baby was born. How easily he had fallen into the habit of going out! He had not seemed to mind his enforced loneliness. I decided that this state of affairs was bound to exist when a baby came.

With the advent of warm weather Baby fretted and I was not well. Floyd was kind and mildly interested in Faire. But he did not hover around her now as in the beginning. And night after night he was away, but I had not time to miss him, as the child required all my attention. July, with its scorching days, came; Mother still spent her Wednesdays with me, and Baby always seemed better with her than when with me. Then, one evening, Floyd came home with news.

"I 'm going on my vacation to-morrow, Beth," he announced.

I wondered why the tears sprang to my eyes. Then I knew that somewhere in the background

of my thoughts had lingered the hope that Floyd and I and the baby might go away together. He did not notice the tears.

"Culver has a bungalow in the lower part of the State; he has invited six of the men down there. Shooting, fishing, boating — great times, and I may stay for three weeks," he wound up.

"You go to-morrow?" I managed to ask.

"Yes," he said. "I leave here at five o'clock in the morning. I sha'n't disturb you, Beth."

We did not try to read that night, for Floyd wanted to see his friend about what "stuff" to take. I sat upstairs with the baby in my arms. Suddenly I ached, not physically, but mentally. I ached for something that only now I missed. What was it?

Floyd came in late, as usual. He kissed me lightly.

"I 'll turn in now," he said; "take care of yourself and the baby; I 'll write to you."

That was all! I heard him go the next morning, but I made no sign. For three weeks! And we had never been parted for a day in our married life of nearly three years.

His first letter came. He told me about the

men and the times that they were enjoying. "I wish that you could get away, dear," he finished; "but, of course, you cannot leave the baby, as you have so often said; and you can't travel with her, so also you have said."

How readily he had fallen into my way of thinking! A little reproach sprang up in my heart against him. He did not argue at all — had never argued since the baby came. He had simply accepted my views and passively acquiesced in my statements that I could not leave her.

And I missed him, now that he was gone from me. The scales seemed to fall from my eyes as an overwhelming thought struck me sharply with its truth. Floyd had become simply an interested comrade. All the finer qualities of our intimacy had disappeared in the blunter ones of off-hand comradeship. He no longer offered me the dear little attentions that he had given to me as sweetheart and wife. The old, tender companionship lay like a mirage — behind me.

I went to the cradle, and, lifting Faire, gazed into her clear eyes. The same throbbing love swept over me as I held her, but now I knew

that it lacked completeness. I wanted my husband, too. Not the baby's father, but my husband.

And I had put him from me. And if he had felt the separation at all he had said nothing, but had simply gone his way and I had gone mine.

It hurt; it hurt so that a scar remains and I cannot put my finger on it now without wincing. His jolly letters came, written as from one man to another, breathing only good-fellowship, or so it seemed to me as I read his words with miserable, wide-open eyes.

I had plenty of time to think; and I would not turn to Mother — Mother who looked at me and knew; who helped me with her heartfelt wishes, but who would not speak unless I should ask her advice.

Then came a letter which electrified me into a sudden decision: "Culver's wife had arrived; several of the men had gone home; fine times," etc.

Then I swept from my wardrobe the white dress with the blue trimmings that I had worn at the engagement dinner which Floyd's mother had given for me; it did not matter that it was a lit-

tle old-fashioned — Floyd loved it. That was all I took, except the dress which I put on to travel in.

Yes, to travel in! To go to Floyd, and to leave the baby in Mother's care! I was so excitedly happy at the prospect that I did not even stop to conjecture whether or not "Culver's wife" would welcome me.

Mother's eyes lit with gentle fondness when she came at my call. "I am so glad you are going, Beth," she said.

I kissed my baby; my eyes even filled with tears as I left her, but the joy of that other meeting was full upon me.

The bungalow was four miles from the little country station at which I alighted. "Take me within half a mile," I instructed the driver of the old farm wagon.

He set me down on a path that led into woods of sombre beauty.

"To your right, ma'am," he said; "and keep on till you come to 'Culver's Bungalow.' The name 's written over the door."

I do not know now why I wanted to walk;

perhaps to realize that I was near Floyd; to hold my bliss in anticipation for a time.

I had not even sighted the bungalow when I came across a man with a gun. He was sitting with his back to me. He turned at the sound of my approach. In a moment he was up. It was Floyd, but a changed Floyd. He was not ruddy with the air, nor breezily cheerful, as he had been when at home. He stared at me as if he could not believe his eyes. Then with one bound he was beside me and had me in his embrace. His kisses, ardent as any lover's, fell upon my face. I closed my eyes for a moment, secure in this love of old, this sweet, sweet love, that had not the rough edge of mere comradeship in it.

"I was hungry for you," he said slowly; "starving for you, wanting you every minute. And yet I stayed."

"But I have come to you, Floyd," I murmured; "I have come to you because I could not stay away."

"Did n't you know that I wanted you?" He paused and gazed at me with longing in his

dear eyes. "I could n't trust myself to say good-by to you that morning."

"But you were so cheerful, so willing to leave me."

"You had set the pace, Beth," he said humbly; "you know best."

The solemnity of his words fell upon me. To set the pace! And he, a good man, would follow because he loved and trusted me.

I would not let my tears mar this golden moment, so I looked smilingly into his face.

"Have you room for me in 'Culver's Bungalow' for a few days?"

He smiled at my foolish question, and drew my arm within his own. And I knew that Baby Faire was smiling happily, and Mother was rejoicing because I had found my husband.

THE FIFTH

WHEN SHE HEARS THE FIRST FLUTTER OF THE WINGS

AS Faire grew older she often wished that a sister had been given to her, but I had taught her to make good friends of her brothers, Harry and Frank. Harry was only a year younger than Faire, and Frank two years younger than Harry.

I think one of the greatest joys in a mother's life (or so it was in my case) is the way in which the children reflect her. I tried to order my life so that the little replicas of me should be worthy. Faire, old-fashioned Faire, like a tall, straight lily, would watch me critically as I conversed with a friend, and to my delight and utter amazement I would see my manner, the very raising of my eyebrows, duplicated a few days later when she entertained her playmate.

I thought for the children, decided for them, and, as Floyd laughingly said, would have breathed for them if possible. And their dependence was sweet to me.

Many things stand out in my memory in these clinging years of the children: the sorrow that I endured when I took Faire to school and left her there for the first time; the tears that burned my eyes when Floyd insisted that Harry's curls should be cut. (He was only three years old.) But Floyd explained that his son must first of all be manly, and he argued, and well, too, that curls were not the thing to be hanging about a sturdy little face that looked already with knowing eyes at the boys who played baseball and other thrilling games.

When Faire was sixteen and Harry fifteen they attended a school which was within walking distance of our home. It was the delight of my life to walk with them to the large, swinging gates and kiss them good-by before entering. Faire always put her arms about my neck and returned my kiss warmly.

One morning when I bade them good-by I felt Harry's cheek burn as I kissed him; I saw

that he glanced furtively at a group of boys playing in the school-yard, and I realized, with a pang, that he simply endured my caress. Yet, he was a loving chap, and never turned from my kisses at home, any more than did little Frank.

Next morning he hurried on before us, and when Faire and I reached the gate he was in the yard. He stood waiting for us to come up. When he saw us he raised his cap and cried:

"Good-morning, Mother. I hurried a little, you see."

Which fact, with the reason therefor, was entirely obvious to me. Though I felt it keenly, I would not let him see my hurt, but hid it beneath a smile of good-fellowship. Perhaps I held Faire a little longer as I kissed her, and perhaps she understood, for she looked back at me so tenderly that I turned quickly away.

I did not tell Floyd, but simply locked the incident away in the memory-chest that held other such mementos, as the loss of Faire when she first went to school and the cutting of my boy's curls.

And our long evenings at home! We sat in the library, where dear Mother's picture looked

down upon us, for she could no longer be with us. The boys studied or read, Faire perhaps practiced softly in the little room off the library, and Floyd and I sat close together, reading and looking at our little group.

When the children are growing up! When they lean on us, confide in us and are in need of our love! Ah, then we feel that we have lived for a purpose, for a great, full purpose that will take root and grow into far-reaching, vital result.

This feeling lay strong upon me one evening. Floyd was reading and I sat near him sewing. Faire had wanted a white dress made like mine which I had worn so many years before; she wanted the flounces scalloped in blue, just as "Mother's" had been, and the old-fashioned surplice was to be arranged in the same way. She was mending the lace that had adorned my mother's wedding gown. Harry and Frank were studying. No one had spoken for some time.

Then Harry looked up. I had taught the children that we had a community of interest; that as we loved and had the welfare of one another

at heart so we could speak at any time with perfect freedom. Sometimes the boys would explain that they wanted me to hear something — "just for your ear alone," Harry had often said — and then we would go upstairs where my boy would tell me a story that meant much to him.

Harry directed his remarks to me. "Mother," he said, choosing his words with care; "I saw Ronald Ferguson to-day."

"Yes?" I replied calmly.

"I walked home with him."

I put down my work. Floyd was still reading.

"But, Harry, I thought I told you that I did not like him — that I wanted you to remain away from him."

The impetuous spirit that had been mine had descended to Harry.

"It is unjust, Mother," he said, "very unjust. You have heard only what the neighbors say. I looked into their charges, and I find that he 's all right."

"What was it about this boy, Harry?" said Floyd gravely.

"Mother does not want me to associate with him," Harry replied. "Mrs. Graham told her

that his parents are not good people, and therefore the boy cannot be all right."

I nodded my head in confirmation. Mrs. Graham's story had been a strong one.

"Well, you like the boy?" Floyd asked.

Harry rose and stood before his father.

"Yes, Father, I do," he answered earnestly. "He 's thoroughly white and a fine boy. Why, he 'll stand up for the right in a way that 's immense. And, Father, I don't see why he should be blamed because his parents are n't good. It is n't fair."

"But Mother asked you not to associate with him," Floyd said.

"Yes, she did, Father," Harry admitted, "but I 've formed my own conclusions. I looked into his life pretty thoroughly" (I saw Floyd smile behind his hand), "and I 've made up my mind that he 's all that he should be. Unless I 'm forbidden, I 'm going to stick to him."

"We 'll let Mother decide that, I think, Harry," Floyd spoke gently. He had noted the boy's set lips and glowing eyes. "Mother can look into the story a little closer."

The lad's face was bright with a light that

shone from within. He did not mean to be at all insolent when he replied:

"That cannot matter, Father. The boy's all right — that's what counts. I've taken his measure, and I know."

He turned to me. "Surely, Mother, in this case I can judge even better than you." He put his arms about my shoulders. "Forgive me, Mother dear," he went on, "but you haven't been with him for hours in school and seen him with the other fellows — fellows whose folks are 'all right,' and yet who cheat at games. They cheat, Mother, but I wasn't forbidden to associate with them."

"I did not know!" I said.

His face beamed. "Of course you didn't know, Mother," he answered quickly, "and you couldn't know about Ronald, either."

The argument was incontrovertible. At his father's word Harry dropped the subject. But we were a quiet little group. Only Faire stole near to me and stroked my hand, and little Frank threw dark looks at his brother in his loyalty to me.

I went upstairs at the same time that the

children did, but not to sleep. I sat near the window and thought. Just a few hours ago my children had been my echoes; they had followed and copied me in a way that was delightful to me.

Now Harry had become an individual, thinking for himself, judging for himself, and, unconsciously condescending, telling me that I could not judge a situation as he could.

The thought that he had thus come to a knowledge of himself; that he had begun to work out his own destiny, that I must not interfere, stung me with its sharpness. I could not help him, I must not influence him. He must stand apart from me and live out his own experiences, take the blows that would come to him, and I might not stand before him and receive them for him.

I slipped down and knelt at the window-sill; I looked up into the dark sky and wished that I could gather my babies into my arms again and laugh over them, kiss them and hold them against all.

But now I must open my arms and let them slip one by one from me into the big world, and

fight, each in the manner that he was equipped, the conditions that would confront him.

As I knelt there struggling with this new, painful understanding Floyd came to me. I leaned against him while he stroked my hair silently.

"Do you know what it means, Floyd?" I asked.

"Yes, Beth," he answered softly, "I know."

We said no more, but later for hours I lay awake and prayed for guidance, with the pain of my boy's growth so strongly upon me that at times I could hardly refrain from crying out.

I felt that I could have endured it better had the knowledge that he was an independent soul crept upon me slowly, but in one moment it had come, and I had simply to bow my head and learn my lesson.

While the sorrow of it was with me, and I had lost sight of all else, Frank crept up to my room one afternoon. He knocked softly and at my call entered.

He was a bonny, light-haired little fellow, with a tender mouth and large soft, brown eyes. He had been somewhat delicate and we had petted

him all his life; shielded him from anything that might hurt him, and, as I realized shortly, softened him into a simple mass of bones and flesh.

"Harold Foster is downstairs," he said; "he came over to play checkers with me. Shall I play, Mother?"

Perhaps it was the remembrance of his brother's keen, well-laid judgment that mercifully opened my eyes to Frank's inertia of mind.

"Why did you come to ask me, dear?" I questioned, instead of giving him the usual advice.

"Oh," he opened his brown eyes full upon me and leaned contentedly against my knee, "because I did n't know whether I wanted to or not. You tell me, Mother."

"And if I say no—"

"Then I 'll just stay with you," he responded.

"And what will your little friend do?"

"Oh, I guess he 'll stay downstairs until he 's tired, then he 'll go home."

I was aghast! In two days, what sharp lessons were being forced! I did not speak at once; then: "Don't you ever try to decide for yourself, Frank?" I asked.

"No, Mother," he answered promptly; "I don't like to. And besides, you have always done it for me."

And I had always done it for Harry, but some strong stuff of which he was made had rescued him from the weakness with which I had sought to endow him.

Of a sudden the same thought came that had entered my mind so many times before. What a responsibility was mine! To love and to cherish these little ones — to give to all the same fond treatment!

And Harry with strengthful though unconscious purpose had developed under this treatment as shown to me; while Frank, under the same method, lolled against me, willing to be directed in everything. I saw the years roll away and reveal to my horrified view two pictures.

One, Harry in manhood — strong in a masterful, domineering way, obeyed and disliked, always believing in his own judgment because of his self-sufficiency. The other, Frank, the lovable weakling — unable to form a decision, relying on any crutch that he could obtain.

Oh, my eyes were swept open. Gone were the

maudlin thoughts of yesterday; an exhilarating freshness filled me, as when the farmer puts his hand to the plow and knows that his work will go for something — nay, for everything.

Mine to be the hand that should make these two characters symmetrically strong; mine to be the joy, not of leading, but of guiding.

The color burned my face when I remembered that when suffering over Harry's independence I had hugged to my heart the fact that Frank needed me, leaned upon me and reflected me in every way, and I had hoped that he would never change.

In my awakening I had forgotten Frank's presence. He was still leaning against my knee, gazing up curiously into my face.

"Oh, Mother," he cried, "your eyes are large and sparkling. Are you happy over something?"

"Very happy," I responded truthfully, for there rested with me a renewing sense of what Motherhood really means.

THE SIXTH

THE FIRST FLITTING FROM THE HOME NEST

WHEN Faire was twenty-two He came: a straight, clean-cut young man with an excellent record behind him, and a fair promise of good before him. He looked at my girl with longing eyes, but she gazed straight back at him with calm friendliness in hers. And I was glad.

He, she and I went to the theatre one night. An old-fashioned play was given, with love as its theme. The lad looked at Faire as if he could do for her a hundred times over what the hero was doing for his lady. But still Faire did not respond.

But just as I felt safe and was falling back into the old way of living, with my tall, young slips about me, Faire grew to be distrait. Twice one day I spoke to her and she did not answer.

She was in the act of arranging some roses in a bowl when the doorbell rang on the evening

of that same day, and she dropped the flowers, bowl and all. Her face became the color of the rose-petals, and her eyes shone in a way that made her sweet to look upon. Then I knew. Love had come to her by degrees. Something had awakened her to its presence at last, and my little girl had become a woman. And with the bitterness of death came the thought: Must I give her up?

Faire came to me upstairs in my room while He was speaking to her father in the library. Even as I stroked her bright hair and looked cheerfully into her face, I thought of Floyd, who knew now that he must give into another's keeping this first beloved child of ours.

But I had really not known until she knelt by my side and hid her face on my shoulder.

"Mother," she breathed, "I love him."

Then she was silent as if the utterance of the words had again brought to her the wonder and mystery of it all; as if she could not fathom a love that seemed greater than she had given to me. In this ineffable moment of hers I would say no word that would hurt her.

"He is worthy, Faire," I said.

Ever before she had looked down into my heart, despite brave words, and read what was written there. But now her lovelit eyes were blinded to me. Her face sparkled in its new beauty and the soft color hued her cheeks.

"Oh, he is worthy, Mother," she repeated; "and I did not know that I loved him until last night."

Was it renunciation when I sent her from my knee to school? I had thought so, and yet it was as nothing to this yielding; letting her go from the home nest to brighten the life of another; to strive, as I soon must, to accustom myself to the empty room that no longer echoed to the sound of her sweet voice.

But I must not spoil this moment for her. When at her mother's knee — the mother who had tried to be all in all to her — she told the story of her maiden love, I must not let one thought of my grief enter her happy mind. I smiled at her as I listened to her words. I gave no sign as I saw her turn from me for the first time in her life, when she heard His voice downstairs, the interview with her father ended.

"I must go to him now," she said, the rose

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hue again springing to her face; "and you, Mother, you are happy, too?"

"Very happy for you, Faire," I said, but the tones trembled like caged birds, and I pushed her gently from me.

I thought of Mother when she had kissed me silently as Floyd told his story to my father; I thought of my joyful flitting from the home that had sheltered me for many years. And my heart went out to all the mothers in the world who have suffered such partings as these.

And Floyd? In our many years of married life I had seen the tears but once on his face: that was when Faire was born; now they fell silently from his eyes when he and I sat upstairs and knew that our child was going from us.

And Faire was happy, glowingly happy, like a clear, steadfast light that burns in a shadowed room. For the house seemed already to take on something of the silence that would soon come to it. The boys would not ask Faire to play to them, for Harry confided to me that he would miss her more if she should play up till the very

last. For she was his only sister, who had been his friend and comrade all his life.

She was married in my wedding dress. It was cut square at the neck, and I filled it in with softest tulle. I pinned the wreath upon her hair, and as I did so the uncontrollable tears splashed on her hands.

When she was arrayed in her bridal finery she stood for a moment looking at me. Then suddenly she threw her arms about me.

"I did n't realize, Mother," she sobbed; "I did n't realize that I was leaving you. Oh, Mother, Mother, don't send me away."

Send her away, Child of my Heart! Send her away! For one moment my pulse beat fast; she turned to me now; she could not leave me. My baby who had lain in my arms so many years ago; she was mine. He, waiting below, had no right to her.

Then saner thought prevailed and I looked calmly into her wet eyes.

"You are going to him, Faire. Think of your love, Dear."

I left her standing there with the tears on

her lashes, while I went to search for her father. I found him at last — in the nursery. He sat in the old rocking-chair with Faire's rag doll on his arm. He was looking down at it, humming the quaint lullaby that Faire had made up and which she used to sing with funny little quavers on the last line:

Sleep, my dolly, sleep —
You belong to me.
Sleep, my dolly, sleep —
And don't fly away from me.

I went quietly to him and took the rag doll from his embrace.

"Come, Floyd," I said, a sudden dryness parching all feeling within me. "Come."

He smiled bravely at Faire when he entered my room. When she saw her father approach she ran to him. He held her close, then pushed her gently from him and looked at her for the last moment that she was to be his. I stole out and gave the signal for the wedding march.

When it was all over, when she had gone, I crept up to the nursery. Floyd joined me there, attracted thither as I had been.

Faire and her husband went to housekeeping

immediately upon their return from their wedding trip. At first I went often to see her. But my heart so ached and implored for the return of the old times that I could not bear to see her and then to leave her.

Is a mother's love selfish then? My yearning never ceased, and each time that I saw her fresh pricks of pain were unconsciously given me.

Oh, I was miserable. I wanted that which I had known I could not hold. I did not accuse myself of jealousy then. Only a great, aching void was within me that nothing seemed to fill.

And Faire was so sweet and loving to me. She was always glad to see me; always glad to come home for a visit. But the first time that she came she was in a hurry. She could not wait to remove her hat, and after a few words she was gone again. And I had thought for hours of this first visit — and she could not wait to remove her hat!

All her thoughts were for Him. As was right, I indignantly told the baser part of me; he must be first in everything, I told my heart.

It did not ease my pain to remember that I had left my mother; that Floyd had meant all

the world to me. Nothing could lessen my sorrow, and day after day I sat upstairs unable sometimes to endure the growing pain. And I sat idly, for Faire had no more need of me.

I went to my work-basket one day and looked at the remnants of laces lying in it. And as I looked I felt that I would give anything I possessed if Faire should ask me to do something for her: to sew the lace in the neck and sleeves of her gown, or to embroider the flounces of her party dress. But she did not need my help now.

One day after a visit to her and a return of my pain in all its poignancy I went down to dinner in the listless fashion that had become natural to me. Floyd, so much stronger than I, so much the sweeter character, had put aside his feelings and seemed to be the same; whereas I hugged to my breast my own misery.

After dinner, Harry asked me to play a game of chess.

"Or give us some music, Mother," he pleaded, "*or do something.* Don't we count now that Faire is not here?" he finished wistfully.

Sharply I was pulled up. I had done nothing

for Floyd and the two boys since Faire had gone. I had done nothing but keep warm the ignoble feelings that possessed me by thinking of myself alone.

"We need you, Mother," Harry said, coming to me and looking into my eyes; "we need you just the same."

"Need you!" The words were a stimulant to me. I kissed my boy tenderly and then went to the piano. Floyd lit the lamp with the pink shade. (He always loved its soft glow to fall on me.) I sang such tender little ballads as came to me from the old-fashioned past, and my husband and sons listened and applauded me bravely when I had finished one song, and then asked for more.

I was fairly happy again, for Harry was smiling and Floyd was bending over the piano in his old loverlike attitude. "Do it all the time, Mother," Harry said. "I've missed you, oh, like everything!"

"And so have I," said quiet Frank, who at eighteen never looked at girls and fled at the rustle of their skirts; "I've stayed out lots of nights just wandering around."

"Stayed out, Frank!" I cried; "you did n't want to come home?"

"No," he answered, "what was the use? You were n't around and the house was like a decorated tomb. I thought, too, like Harry, that we did n't matter any more."

My heart stood still as I thought of my boy wandering about, not caring to come home. And I had sat upstairs ignorant of everything, interested in nothing. I went to Frank and put my arms about him.

"We 'll have our jolly times again, won't we?" I said, a sob catching in my throat. "You won't wander any more, will you, Frank?"

"No, Mother," he answered. "It 's home when you 're with us."

So I had almost missed the sweetness lying at hand, as I had so often in my life. Because one joy had gone I had not sought for others that were there waiting to be gathered.

Next day I made Frank's college flag that had lain so long awaiting my touch. I put flowers on the dining-room table, and when evening came I wore a white dress with a rose pinned at my throat. And I laughed and talked so that my

boys thought the hurt was gone from my heart.

Soon Harry came to me as of old and confided in me. Frank, alive with ambition, brought his drawings to me and asked for my criticism. And Floyd read passages to me from his favorite authors.

I had my place to fill, and I had forgotten that I must not leave it empty. And when the readjustment was almost perfect Faire came to me. And then I knew that the happiness of service for her was yet to be mine. She knelt by my side as she had when she told me of her young love. She whispered her words of hope, of the divine promise that was to be fulfilled for her.

"And, Mother," she murmured, "I need you now more than anybody else."

I pressed her close to me, my heart overflowing that this sweet task was to be mine, and that she needed me.

"It is strange, Mother, is n't it?" she went on, "that I thought of you first when I knew; even Alfred came second for the time being, because you only can understand."

To understand! — The divinest gift of all. Ah! My life is rich with the joy of service-giving.

THE END



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